

You are Your Brother's Keeper

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon and welcome to our lunchtime Bible talk today. Please do make use of the lunches on offer after the service if you have time. And please stay behind and get chatting to those around you.

Now, we're in the middle of some studies in 1 Corinthians. So perhaps you could turn up to 1 Corinthians chapter 5 in your Bibles. And whilst you do that, let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can gather together in the middle of the week to hear you speak to us through your living and active word.

Help us to put off all the distractions and all the things that pull at us this week so that we may focus now on hearing you speak. Help us to hear and respond and be encouraged to walk in your ways.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans.

[1 : 12] For a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit. And as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Lord, your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

[2 : 31] But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one.

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

Last year, I visited a driving range with some friends. We put our tokens into the machine and filled our baskets full of golf balls. Always ambitious, despite having no golfing pedigree whatsoever, I reached for the biggest driver in the bag, lined up my first shot, no practice swing needed.

First hit, and the ball went soaring straight into the post beside me. Thinking this was merely a one-off, I lined up a few more balls to hit, and ball after ball, they were mishit and miscued, hitting the roof above me, the posts around me, and scrambling along the ground.

A change of club wasn't the help either. There was a fundamental flaw that played out in each shot I hit. No matter the club or the tee or the ball, the flaw was my swing.

[3 : 59] Paul, in chapters 1 to 4, is highlighting the fundamental flaw at the heart of the Corinthian problem. That's their swing. And now we see it play out in chapters 5 to 14 in the various areas of church life, each different shot skewed in its own way because they've got it wrong from what he's been showing us in chapters 1 to 4.

Their fundamental problem was that they rejected Paul's gospel and his ministry, thinking that they'd moved on to some sort of higher spiritual plan. They were arrogant and felt superior as Christians to Paul and to other churches.

We saw last week that this played out in the pattern of how they did ministry. They thought that the spiritual was all that was important. They thought that they were now living as spiritually resurrected beings.

So their lives looked impressive to the world in complete contrast to Paul's foolish-looking ministry and his foolish-looking gospel that obsessed with Christ crucified.

And the problem is going to shine through in key areas of church life for much of the rest of this letter. And that's what we find in chapter 5. In verses 1 to 2, we see that the church has a collective responsibility for sin.

[5 : 20] The church has a collective responsibility for sin. We see in verse 1 the presenting problem, and it is a big problem. It's been reported that there is sexual immorality amongst the Corinthian church.

A man is having relations with his father's wife. This behavior is so inappropriate that even the pagans wouldn't tolerate it. That's what Paul says in verse 1. But this problem was like an iceberg. This man and his actions are just the tip, the obvious bit that's easily seen. It's the presenting issue of something far greater. Look at verse 2.

Paul says, this is going on in your church, and you dare to be arrogant. The church tolerates this behavior. It appears that this man hasn't been challenged, but rather he's allowed to continue unabated in the sort of conduct that even the pagans in the immoral Corinth knew was wrong. Is that the sign of a spiritually superior church? Well, the arguments that's shown may well mean that the Corinthians, in their high form of spirituality, thought that they could do it.

[6 : 32] They thought it was okay. Or perhaps they're so busy getting one up on each other to be better and superior that sin wasn't a problem. They cherish the idea of being superior.

They live for the experience of spirituality in some heightened form. They love the experience of speaking in tongues, of all these supernatural things.

They love being swooned by eloquent words, listening to wonderfully sounding preachers. But what we see here is a church that treasures those experiences over genuine obedience.

Verse 6. They boast, yet they have flagrant sin amongst them. There are two issues here that Paul is addressing. The first is that this man's sin is serious.

Yes, of course it is. But the second is how it's being received by the church. There's a collective responsibility for it that they're not practicing. So Connor the Corinthian may have been the one that committed this misbehaving, but that doesn't mean that Charles the Corinthian or Claire the Corinthian are free from blame.

[7 : 52] It doesn't mean that their hands are clean. There's a collective responsibility and Paul makes clear how they should respond to this. And it must begin at the very least with mourning.

Verse 2. Stop the superiority and boasting. There ought to be a deeply felt dissatisfaction that this has happened. The world around could see that it shouldn't be, but the church isn't interested. They're still boasting. They're still playing the superior cards. And Paul goes on to say that the cross means that we must take sin seriously verses 3 to 8.

The cross means that we must take sin seriously both for the good of the individual and for the good of the church. We see these in verses 3 to 5, the individual and verses 6 to 8 for the church.

For the individual, Paul urges discipline. Paul says that this man is to be removed from amongst them. You can't let him still be coming along pretending to be a Christian when he's clearly abandoned the lifestyle.

[9 : 01] Let him who has done this be removed from amongst you. Verse 2. Verse 5. You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. That is, put him back into the world.

He's not to be in the church, but he's to be back in the realm that Satan has control over. Verse 13. Purge the evil person from among you.

Paul urges sanctions to be taken against this man. He's to be disciplined because this man is in perilous danger if he continues to sin against God unrepentantly.

Someone in this position needs to know just how serious it is to walk away from God's way. It's a dangerous thing to be in a collision course with God.

And that's what's at stake in all this. Verse 5. What will happen at the day of the Lord? What will happen at the day of the Lord? If someone is allowed to continue this path, then it's a path that leads to destruction.

[10:05] Being removed from church, asked not to come, barred, cut off from the fellowship is a drastic measure. It shouldn't be taken lightly. Some will even think that Paul speaks a bit too strongly here.

Maybe a better approach is to just keep loving this man until he sees sins. Maybe in a similar situation, some of us might be tempted to think that we need to just be compassionate and we must not let this man think that we're unloving and unkind in case he thinks that church isn't really for him anymore.

Or maybe some of us just think it's really difficult to cast a friend out. We don't like confrontation. It sounds cold. What are others going to think of us?

It doesn't sound very Christian. After all, compassion is a Christian response. Now, Paul is very clear what needs to happen here.

This man is rejecting what God says is right and he's on a collision course with God. The sooner he realizes this, the better it will be for him. Paul has no problem pronouncing judgment on this man because he's doing it for his good.

[11:15] He's not being cold and hard. He's concerned, verse 5, that he might be saved at the last day. He says, hand him over to Satan.

Let him see the consequences of what he's doing so that maybe he'll come to his senses. Verse 4 shows us that the assembly, the whole church, here, is important.

Paul sets up a contrast. When assembled in the name of Jesus with the apostles' authority there, with the power of Jesus, remove this man from these things. Remove him from the church.

Remove him from the kingdom of light back into the world, back into the kingdom of Satan. When someone decides to pursue a lifestyle, it's not in keeping with belonging to the church. when they deliberately do it, when they continually do it, when they don't care what God says about it, then they need to get the seriousness of what they're doing.

[12:15] It is much more loving, it is much more compassionate to show them that what they're doing is grievous. To let them know that it changes everything if they keep doing it.

because that might be what saves them in the end. It is not loving to normalize sin in order to keep a relationship. It is not loving to downplay how serious it is to reject God.

Paul wants the church to take action here, not because he is cold and cruel, but because it's the best thing in the long term, both for this man and also for the church.

And that's what we see in verses 6 to 8. No church can take the gospel seriously whilst blatantly permitting sin that's open and it's unrepentant.

If the Corinthian response to this problem is to tolerate it, to boast in their spiritual state, then what's the right response? How does Paul's focus and clarity about the gospel, about Christ crucified, shape a church's response?

[13:24] sin like this is not isolated. How it is responded to tells everything about how a church responds to the gospel and all of its implications for our lives.

If a church leaves it unchallenged, if things proceed unchecked, then all that says is that that church allows it to happen. And it won't be long until there are more issues just the same because people will begin to think, I can get away with this.

It's okay to do this. The seed that is planted from feeling to challenge behavior in a church is that it becomes okay to do it. It's okay to do it and still be there.

And that's a dangerous seed that will sprout only rotten fruit. verse 6. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Do you not know that a bitter root, a twisted root, ends up spoiling the whole thing?

This is where Paul's clarity about the cross takes hold. His response to this problem flows out of his focus on Christ crucified. Verse 7.

[14:37] Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump because Christ has been crucified. He is talking about the old and the new.

Previously, before Christ was crucified, you were controlled by sin, but now you're freed from it. Verse 8. So let us celebrate not with the old, being trapped by sin, being controlled by it, but with the new, being freed from it.

Paul's saying we haven't been freed to sin, we've been freed from it. Simply, Paul is saying Christ crucified means that we are made new.

We have left and can leave the old life behind. And much more he is saying, let us now live as the new people that we are. The Passover festival was for those who had been rescued from Egypt. It was a sign for Israel to remember the rescue that as a people they had enjoyed. So too is Christ crucified. It's the rescue for us from darkness and sin.

[15 : 49] In Christ, Christians experience a transfer from the realm of darkness to the kingdom of God. From evil to light. From sinner to saint.

Paul is saying that it is through the cross that we can and must enjoy all of these things. Freedom from the slavery of sin. Freedom from the traps that Satan wants us to get stuck in.

Corinth is a church that treasures experience. Their sense of spirituality is derived from the tangible, the impressive. The things that make us feel special, that make us feel different.

But all of that is at the cost of holiness. A church that wants to be spiritual, that wants to be truly spiritual, strives to grow together in holiness.

No amount of apparent spiritual experiences negate that priority. If we wish to be truly spiritual, we are not simply to seek great experiences of God, but rather to strive to grow in holiness.

[16 : 55] Christ has been sacrificed. It wasn't so that his church could remain as they were. It was so that he could truly celebrate. It was to bring new life, escape from what will destroy us.

And so the cross means that we must take sin seriously. We've been rescued from it. Its clutches on our lives have been loosened. We can escape it.

A church cannot truly celebrate and enjoy the gospel when there's obvious sin that's allowed to continue. If it's allowed, then that is going to pull the church, the whole church, back into what they've been freed from.

A church is not living in the kingdom of light, is not enjoying new life with Christ when it's so interested in what makes them superior that they're compromised by taking their behavior lightly. but a church that is reveling in all that Christ has done. When they take sin seriously, they help each other to strive to live the good life that God has for them.

[18 : 09] And so finally, Paul says that you are your brother's keeper. Verses 9 to 13, you are your brother's keeper. The Corinthians have become a church where it's okay to misbehave.

was the man at fault? Of course he was. Was the church guiltless in that? No. This man's sin was tolerated, which is a reflection on the whole church.

It fosters an environment that says it's okay to do that. Paul says to the Corinthians that they are not to associate with those who are obviously living corrupt lives.

And he clarifies for them, he's not talking about the world out there. He's talking about the church. For verse 10, if it was the case that he was talking about the world, we would need to be removed from it.

We couldn't be in the world. We can't escape those things. Of course we don't hold the world to our standards. We don't start evangelism by telling people they don't live as Christians.

[19 : 13] We start with pointing them to Jesus and then people who respond rightly to Jesus are transformed. with a new life. Paul's concern here for the church is how they interact with each other, with those in the church, verse 11.

It is those who are brothers that they shouldn't associate with when they misbehave so obviously. Paul is giving all Christians responsibility here. What he says means you can't look over your shoulder and think this isn't about me.

Paul is laying it at the feet of the whole church to not let it be okay to misbehave. Bad behavior thrives when there's an environment that says it's okay.

Whether it be sexual immorality or gossip or whatever it is, bad behavior thrives in a church when nobody challenges it. You have a stake in it as much as I do, as much as anyone else does.

Paul says don't have people who are so blatantly misbehaving to lunch and pretend it's all okay. Verse 11 You can't pretend it's okay.

[20 : 26] We are our brother's keeper, so we have a responsibility to each other in church. If someone is heading down a slippery path, it's up to us, each of us, to be pulling them off it.

If they've fallen off the path and do not want to get back on, then it's our responsibility to help them see how disastrous that's going to be. Now, of course, with all of this, there can be misunderstanding.

Paul isn't saying in verse 12 that we're to walk around church with a notepad, marking any little slip that everyone has. We're not to be telling people and making people feel unwelcome all the time.

This is not a cold and a hard discipline. It's not to shame people. It's not to develop pride on our own part. And it's not a knee-jerk reaction to get rid of anyone who sins in church, because then it would be empty.

When Paul says, purge the evil person from among you, verse 13, he is saying that someone who professes to be a Christian, yet obviously doesn't live like it, someone who is openly rebelling against God and shows no remorse, the best thing that can be done for them is to remove them for his good, that he might come to his senses and realize just what it is that he has done and is doing, and to help them see that that is disastrous in the end, because in doing that you may just see of them, but it's also for the good of the whole church, because that is a corrupting influence that will pull others into it.

[22 : 06] Corinth was a church obsessed with their spiritual experience. It created divides amongst the church, those who were special, and the rest, a hierarchy, a me-centered church.

Paul says that the cross of Christ makes Christians into a new community that can celebrate, just like Israel, who became a people freed together from slavery after the Passover, so the church is freed together from the kingdom of darkness, from the control of sin, to live as a new community, a spiritual church loves one another and loves one another enough to help each other take sin seriously.

That doesn't sound glitzy. That's not the Corinthians' higher form of spirituality. It doesn't look good. It's very simple sounding, but it's hard work.

But verse 5, at the day of the Lord, that church will be saved, the church that does that. That church will stand with all the people of God at the last day.

That church will be celebrating forever the festival of the new Passover Lamb. That church is a church that's shaped by Christ crucified, that see just exactly what Jesus came to do and what he accomplished.

[23 : 36] They're not arrogant over one another, but loving one another. A love that's deep enough to discipline when necessary, that's deep enough to pull people off dangerous paths, that's deep enough to care where people are heading.

It's a love that nourishes a church to prize a holy life above apparently heavenly experiences. that's the unglamorous, but the truly spiritual life that is shaped by the cross.

The holy life is much, much more important than the life marked by all sorts of spiritually high experiences. That's the unglamorous, but the truly spiritual life shaped by the cross.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would teach us to truly love one another, to cherish all that we have in Christ, knowing full well what we've been rescued from, that we would help others to not go back to that, that we would look out for one another with a love that truly cares for our brothers and sisters, that we might all strive to live the good life that God has rescued us for, because Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. And it's in his name we pray. Amen.